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THE BREATH OF THE LORD,

AND

THE SIEVE OF VANITY;

A SERMON,

DELIVERED AT MONKWELL-STREET MEETING
ON TUESDAY, NOV. 7, 1797,

By *WILLIAM HUNTINGTON, S. S.*

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MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL
AT PROVIDENCE CHAPEL, LITTLE TITCHFIELD-STREET,
AND AT MONKWELL-STREET MEETING.

FOR LO, I WILL COMMAND, AND I WILL SIFT THE HOUSE OF
ISRAEL AMONG ALL NATIONS, LIKE AS CORN IS SIFTED IN
A SIEVE; YET SHALL NOT THE LEAST GRAIN FALL UPON
THE EARTH. Amos ix. 9.

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Gen. Wellwyn, Herts.

1797.

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S E R M O N.

ISAIAH xxx. 28.

AND HIS BREATH, AS AN OVERFLOWING STREAM,
SHALL REACH TO THE MIDST OF THE NECK, TO
SIFT THE NATIONS WITH THE SIEVE OF VANITY :
AND THERE SHALL BE A BRIDLE IN THE JAWS OF
THE PEOPLE, CAUSING THEM TO ERR.

THE prophet, in the preceding verses, is predicting Jerusalem's destruction, and the abundance of God's grace and spirit upon the little hills of Zion, both among the believing Jews and Gentiles, at that time;—verse 25. He next prophesies of the superabounding light which, in gospel days, should exceed that of the former dispensation; that if the church of God was called the *moon* then, it should now be called the *sun*; and that, if there were children of the day in that state, the light should be as the light of seven days in this;—verse 26. He

then proceeds to Christ, calling him *the name of the Lord*,—in allusion to God's charge to Moses, *Offend him not, for my name is in him*; and because the name of the Lord, proclaimed before Moses, *The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and in truth, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin*, was now, in a most wonderful manner, to be verified, to be made known, and to be experienced and enjoyed by all the elect of God. But, as this name of the Lord was sadly provoked for forty years together by the unbelieving Jews in the wilderness, so it would be provoked again by those who refuse to hear his voice, and harden their hearts against him, as in the provocation, when their fathers tempted him, proved him, and saw his works forty years. And so likewise it would be with the unbelieving Gentiles, against whom, as well as against the Jews, he would come burning with anger; and those, who set themselves against him, should find and feel the burden of his indignation; for his word as a fire shall kindle in them, and at last destroy them; and my text informs you how. *And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err.*

In this work I will endeavour to give you my thoughts in the following order:

1. What I understand by the Lord's *breath*.
2. Why compared to a *stream*.
3. The

3. The *neck* which this stream reaches to.
4. The *sieve of vanity* used among the nations;
and
5. The *bridle in the jaws of sinners, which shall make them to err.*

The first account that we have of the breath of the Lord is in Gen. ii. 7. *God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.* A living soul was infused into Adam's body, which animated it, actuated it, influenced it, and possessed it; and man was pronounced good; for God made man upright, yea, in the image of God created he him. But, alas! Adam sinned, and all that was good left him, and evil found him: life left him, and the sentence of death entered into him: *Sin entered, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all, for all have sinned.* But God promises to the house of Israel that he will breathe upon them once more. *Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live; for I will put my spirit into you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it.* The New Testament will inform us of the going forth of this breath of the Lord among the nations. *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And, when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.* John xx. 22, 23. This is the
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going forth of the breath of the Lord into the nations; for they were to go into all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature; and the Spirit of the Lord was to speak in them, and these effects were to follow—some men's sins were to be remitted, and the sins of others were to be retained; those that believe are to be saved, and those that believe not are to be damned. Hence the servants of the Lord are a sweet savour of God in them that are saved, and in them that perish; for Christ by his Spirit speaks in his servants; and hence it is said that *with the rod of his mouth he smites the earth* (and heals it again), *and with the breath of his lips he slays the wicked*: and these things are done by the words which are in the mouth of every minister of the Spirit; *and thus life and death are in the power of the tongue*: for some are quickened by the Spirit, and others are left twice dead, plucked up by the roots. I come now to treat of the *stream* to which the Lord's breath is compared.

The Holy Spirit's well known emblems are those of breath, wind, fire, and water; two of which are mentioned in my text; the last of which is that of an overflowing *stream*, which carries all before it; for he fits, qualifies, and sends the preacher; directs him where to go, and where not; and furnishes him with matter and manner; and always works with and by the word. Some souls he enters into, and abides with; and *they are saved by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost*: while
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those who resist him, and oppose themselves to him, and endeavour to counteract his work, and ridicule and abuse his power, influence, and operations, he leaves dried, blasted, and withered, under the rebukes and reproofs of heaven, which kindle in them, as fit fuel for everlasting burnings. *Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.* Isai. xxx. 33.—Under the wrath and curse of God the gospel finds such sinners, and under the same it leaves them; when hardness of heart, desperate wickedness, or a fearful looking-for of judgment, is sure to follow, to find out, and, sooner or later, to consume these adversaries. This stream reaches to the midst of the neck, which is what I come next to describe.

The *neck* is that part of the human body which unites the head and the body together; and to this the scriptures often allude; for instance, Christ is called the *head*, as he is the head of influence, from whom all grace flows; and the *covenant head*, who represents the whole church; and the church is his body. *Now ye are the body of Christ*, saith Paul, *and members in particular*: and again, *the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church*. But then what can the neck be, that unites this glorious head to this mystical body? I think this neck must be the covenant of grace; for God the Father first chose that human nature, which the

Word was to assume, from everlasting, and then chose us in him, gave us to him, and made us one with him: and he fixed his eternal love upon us in him before the world was made. By the tenor of this covenant elected sinners were espoused to Christ from everlasting, and are openly betrothed to him in time. *I will betroth thee to me in righteousness, in mercies, and in loving kindness; yea, I will betroth thee to me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.* Thus this secret betrothing to Christ in eternity terminates in openly espousing us to him in time by the gospel, as Paul speaks; *I have espoused you unto a good husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ.* Hence it appears that, by the covenant of grace, we were made one with Christ in eternity; but then where is that which unites us to him in time? Nothing can do this but love, because we are enemies; and enmity separates between the Lord and us. God reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has sent the word of reconciliation to us; and we are entreated by his servants to be reconciled to him. But, as the carnal mind is enmity against him, nothing but his love revealed, made known, and shed abroad in the heart, can remove our enmity: this will make us friends; and this, and only this, can unite us to him; for *love is the bond of all perfectness*; and this is the bond that *binds the soul up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God*: and this love, winning and drawing all our love to him, is the *neck* that unites
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the covenant head and his body mystical together; and where this is wanting there can be no union; for *he that loveth father or mother better than me is not worthy of me.*

Many high encomiums are put upon this *neck* of the holy spouse. *Thy neck is comely with chains of gold.* Song i. 10. The *neck* is mutual love between Christ and his bride; the chains are the promises of the gospel, the apples of gold in pictures of silver: for, in plain English, all that do not receive the love of the truth, and the truth in the love of it, are given up to believe a lie; for God shall send to them strong delusions.

Again—*Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.* Song iv. 14. This intimates that the many infernal and human attacks that are made at the church, to separate her from her heavenly head and husband, are all in vain; though, to accomplish this, hath ever been, and ever will be, the schemes, plots, and unholy war, both of devils and reprobates: but, in covenant, God and his truth are both our shield and buckler.

Again—*Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse: thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.* Song iv. 9. Love is the neck; and this chain, or the spouse's necklace, is the doctrines of the gospel, which, like a chain, hang all together, and depend one on another;

other; in which there is a wonderful harmony, every link bearing its part: and without every link be kept in its proper place, the whole chain is weakened, entangled, and confused; and appears so to every poor, weak believer, both in the scriptures, in the judgment, and in the experience, of the poor soul; and so they feel it to their sorrow, whose minds have been unsettled, their judgments bewildered, and their affections excluded for a while from the Lord Jesus, by the instrumentality of damnable heretics, who have seduced them from Christ, that they might affect them.

Solomon, in his dark sayings, gives his pupils many instructions about the neck. *My son, bear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother; for they shall be an ornament of grace to thine head, and chains about thy neck.* The instruction of our father is the tuition of Christ, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace: the law of Sarah, who is the mother of us all, is the law of faith: the best ornament of grace to the head is *God the health of our countenance*; and the best chain to the neck is truth in the love of it.

Again—*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck, write them upon the table of thine heart.* Prov. iii. 3. Mercy, grace, and truth, came by Jesus Christ; and Solomon's counsel is to bind them about our neck; for, if the hearing of these things bring about no union between Christ and the soul, what doth it profit? just nothing: and, if they
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are not written on the tables of the heart, the new covenant is not revealed to the soul; for to write the laws of God on the heart and mind, and to remove sin from us, and to remember it no more, is the better covenant: and where this is not done, there can be no experience of this deliverance from sin; and where there is no experience of pardon, there can be no hope of the glory of God in heaven; for it is experience that worketh hope. Thus Christ is the head; and all the elect, Jews and Gentiles, are the body. God in covenant made them one in eternity; and when covenant love is made known to them, they become one spirit in time: love, as the neck, unites them; and, by virtue of this union, the body is influenced by the head, and made fruitful, as a branch is in the vine, or as a wife is to her husband: and the great truths of the gospel are the church's ornamental necklace. But, after all, this is not the *neck* mentioned in my text.

There is another head, besides Christ. Satan bears this name: *The woman's seed shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* This work was done in a figure at Israel's deliverance out of Egypt, for Pharaoh was a type of the devil. *Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation even to the neck.* Hab. iii. 13. When God poured on the Egyptians the fierceness of his wrath, he sent evil angels among them; and these influenced Pharaoh, and all his mighty warriors, to pursue Israel; and, when God overthrew them

them in the Red Sea, he is said to break *the beads of the dragons in the waters*. Psalm lxxiv. 13. It is this head that influences and leads on the whole host of persecutors against Christ. *But he shall wound the bead of his enemies*, Psalm lxviii. 21. And this work he did effectually when he triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross; and the blessed effects of this hath been, still is, and will be, seen and known, all the world over, in future times, *when he shall wound the beads over many countries*.

This head has got a body, in which he reigns and rules; and these are the children of disobedience: and there is a sad covenant betwixt them, called *a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell*, Isai. xxviii. 18; the bond of which is *the bond of iniquity*, which bond is love to sin, and hatred to God. This is the *neck* mentioned in my text, which keeps the devil and his children together; and, as sure as *he that is joined to a harlot is one body* (1 Cor. vi. 16), so sure those *that go a whoring after devils* (Levit. xvii. 7), are one spirit with him. The Holy Ghost runs the parallel betwixt these two heads and bodies. We read of the head Christ, and the head Satan;—of a covenant with Christ, and of a covenant with hell;—of the church of Christ, and of the synagogue of Satan;—of the bond of all perfectness, and of the bond of iniquity;—of love to God, and of love to sin;—of espousals to Christ, and of whoring with devils;—of the mystery of godliness, and the mystery of iniquity;—the doctrines of God, and

the doctrines of devils;—of Christ the everlasting Father, and of a people who are of their father the devil;—of the children of God, and children of the devil;—of the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils;—the table of the Lord, and the table of the devils;—of fellowship with the Lord, and of fellowship with devils;—of Christ in the heart by faith, and of Satan in the hearts of the disobedient;—and, as sure as the love of God in the heart, and a hatred to sin, is the church's neck, that unites her to Christ, so sure love to sin, and hatred to God, is the neck that holds Satan and his whore together; and so it will appear in the great day.

■ But *the breath of the Lord, like an overflowing stream, reaches to the midst of this neck, and breaks this bond of iniquity, and hedges up the sinner's way with thorns*; so that, if he pursues after his lovers, he cannot overtake them; the arrows of wrath, the bucklers of justice, and the stings of guilt, pierce him, insomuch that he cannot get on in the old track. *The yoke of his transgressions shall be destroyed, because of the anointing.* His agreement with death shall be disannulled, and his covenant with hell shall not stand; for Christ will have a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death, in order to redeem this portion; and therefore he will spoil the house of the strong man armed. It was this breath of the Lord, reaching the heart, and conveying Christ's everlasting love into it, that brought

brought about an eternal separation between Mary Magdalen and her seven devils. This neck, this love to sin, which is the bond of iniquity, is the grand cement which holds all idolaters, all work-mongers, or self-admirers, which are idolaters, and all the mystical Babel builders to their sandy foundation; as was the case with Paul, till God discovered it. *Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation to the neck. Salab. Hab. iii. 13.* Take notice of that.

When this foundation is discovered, and this neck made bare, it inflicts a wound in the infernal head; it lays open his policy, and crushes his power; it alarms the poor secure mortal, and makes him feel his bonds; and he groans under them, and calls for deliverance; and God, in answer to his cry, opens the prison doors to him that is bound.

I now proceed to describe the *sieve of vanity*. This sieve is not the gospel; it is not the ministration of the Spirit, which God ordained for our glory; this is not a vain thing, or vanity; though some men that perish have called it foolishness, when compared to Grecian wisdom: yet the gospel is not a light, trifling, empty thing; for it treats of the most weighty, powerful, solid, and momentous things, that ever were heard of beneath the sun; such as redemption, salvation, the grace of God, and everlasting glory. Besides, the gospel is distinguished from this sieve in the text itself. The gospel is called *the breath of the Lord*; but this sieve

is the sieve of vanity. Whatever it is, it seems to be something which is intended to shake, to winnow, to try, and to exercise, in order to prove what is good grain and what is not; and so to separate the one from the other, or the vile from the precious: and therefore, under the all-wise conduct of God, it is among the all things that work for good to them that love God; and so it is written, *For lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.* Amos ix. 9. It is well known that God's professing church is called a floor, and his children are called corn. *O my threshing, and the corn of my floor; that which I have heard of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.* Isai. xxi. 10. This sieve of vanity appears to be the temptations of Satan: he is the drudge, or slave, that God makes use of to do this black and dusty work in his floor; and the malicious mind of this evil spirit prompts him to be very fond of it. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* Luke xxii. 31, 32. In the above passage several useful lessons of instruction may be learnt to our comfort:—the first is, the bent of the devil's mind to mischief, and to torment those that he cannot destroy. *Satan hath desired to have you; take notice of that; he hath desired, &c.* he hath for some time

time been desirous of having thee; but I have not suffered him hitherto, whatever I may do. Hence we learn that this poor scavenger cannot perform his enterprize without leave from the Lord of the harvest: it is not what the devil desires, but it is what the Lord determines, that shall be done. We may perceive that the devil wished to go through stich with this business: he did not want to sift Peter like barley, or lentiles; nor like vetches, which require but a little winnowing; but like *wheat*, which must go into the sieve again and again. But can we suppose that Satan has such an aversion to chaff, that he is so desirous of sifting poor Peter, that he might make him as pure as wheat? No, no. Dust is Satan's meat, and chaff is Satan's fuel; and it is the only part or lot that falls to his share in all the floor. What the devil wished to blow out of Peter's heart was the grace of God, and especially the grace of faith: against this the devil shook his riddle with all his might; and in behalf of this the Lord bent his whole prayer, *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.* And thus the Lord's end, and Satan's aim, widely differ:—the Lord intended to purge Peter from confidence in the flesh, and the devil to winnow him out of all confidence in the Lord:—the Lord intended to make Peter more useful by it, and Satan to make him both fruitless and useless. *When thou art converted* (from thy self-confidence, and art made sensible of thine own weakness, and of my strength made

made perfect in it), *then strengthen thy brethren;—* strengthen their faith in me, Simon, that they may be strong in the grace that is in me, and not in their own frames, however lively, or however joyful.

Though all men be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended, saith poor Simon. Those great words called aloud for this *sieve of vanity*; and poor Peter soon found himself in it: and the devil gave his riddle such a shake, as moved and stirred up every corruption of his heart; enmity, carnal fear, cowardice, shame, rebellion, infidelity, anger; and so filled his heart with blasphemy, that the very oaths and curses ran out of his mouth. But the Holy Spirit will ever glorify Christ, and will testify of him; so that he would not leave Peter; but, as the Spirit of all grace, and that of faith in particular, he kept possession of Peter's heart, and made his faith soon to work again by love, for *he went out, and wept bitterly*, cut to the heart with grief for what he had done to his dear Lord and master. However, the faithful and true Witness did not fail Peter in this time of trial; nor did the Lord suffer Peter's faith or love to fail from the Lord:—*Lord, thou knowest all things; and thou knowest I love thee,* saith Simon.

This *sieve of vanity* always attends *the breath of the Lord*; or the ministry of the Spirit. Soon after God had breathed into Adam the breath of life, this sieve of vanity came upon him and his wife, and sifted out all that was good. And, when God be-

gan to breathe on the dry bones of the house of Israel in Babylon, to revive their hopes of a return to their own land, the devil opposed it in the court of Persia one and twenty days. Dan. x. 13. And in the holy land at their return we find this sieve working against Joshua, one of the anointed ones, who at the same time was standing before the Lord of the whole earth.

Yea, the Saviour himself was tried by this sieve of vanity; for, as soon as the Holy Ghost descended upon him like a dove, *then was Jesus led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.* But where the breath of life comes not this sieve is seldom used; for there is no wheat to sift; all is chaff, and chaff needs no sifting. The ministry of the letter, and those seedsmen who sow the doctrines and commandments of men, are never followed by *the fowls of the air*; for the devils do not want to pick such seed out of sinners hearts, for such seedsmen are the devil's own labourers. But, if the Lord sends a seedsman to sow precious seed, which is the word of life, then these fowls are all upon the watch, or upon the wing, to pick out the good seed from the mind and memory, in order to make the sinner unfruitful: and this he does by making him inattentive—or by setting some object before him to excite his lasciviousness—or by stirring up his prejudice—or by diverting his mind to worldly things as soon as he comes out of the house of God, till he hath forgotten all that he hath heard. And is it so?

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Do the breath of life and the sieve of vanity go together? They really do. I have never seen the sieve of vanity in use among the congregations of the dead. There are thousands in a profession in our day, who never knew what the fiery darts of the devil and the devices of Satan mean. The strong man armed keeps possession both of the impostor in the pulpit, and of the hypocrite in the pew; and his goods are in peace. He furnishes the preacher with presumptuous confidence, blind zeal, flowery speech, and to affect a musical delivery, to speak swelling words; and he instructs him in the art of oratory and elocution, in order to reach the feelings of corrupt nature, and to play upon them, till their bowels sound like an harp, the blood will trickle in their veins, the hair moves upon their head, and a few deep sighs put the salt spring in motion, and pump a few drops into the eyes, which being distilled on the floor, and being considered as the quintessence of pious grief, and of all devotion, the work is done—the Spirit hath moved—the presence and power of the Lord have been present—and a refreshing season hath been enjoyed: whereas the devil himself is the author and finisher of all such devotion. Such are the most completely self-deceived, the most secure in their carnal state, the most bitter enemies to the vital power of godliness, and the hardest souls in the world for a gospel minister to work upon. Such are worse, and more secure, than a real Pharisee; for a Pharisee is all for the

law, but these are all for what they call gospel:— a Pharisee dwells in a dry land, but these are hypocrites in Zion; not seekers of Christ, but foolish virgins; not work-mongers, but wolves in sheep's clothing. O the infernal trade that the devil carries on in our day by such instruments as these! The dissembled humility and meekness that the devil will varnish them with, and the counterfeited rays of an angel of light that he will spread abroad, through the instrumentality of such crafty and deceitful workers, are such as none can discern, nor describe, but those in whom the living God shines, and whom the Lord condescends to teach. Some are carried on by the false flames of blind zeal, and the inward heat of their own spirit, raised and inflamed by noise and motion. *These follow their own spirit, and speak a vision out of their own heart, and have seen nothing.* Jer. xxiii. 16. Ezek. xiii. 3.— But, at times, conscience, the wrath of God, and disappointments, will so far discourage them, as to render them incapable of performing this branch of magic by fiery and false zeal: then they are obliged to have recourse to that of moving the passions; and there are several books extant to instruct them in this art, and to which they are obliged to have recourse, to enable them to carry on the cheat. Funeral sermons furnish these (instruments without life) with nice rosin for their strings: a few pathetic lies over the deceased work like a charm in the bowels of the survivors. A peculiar tenderness must

must be observed in mentioning the fair sex ; and heavenly expressions must be dropt in lascivious flames. This God calls alluring through the lusts of the flesh, and much wantonness. This art leads captive silly women : but all this is Satan's profit, not his sieve ; he doth not desire to sift such as wheat : these are the tares of his own field, and chaff for his own fire ; these are ensnared in holes ; they are for a prey, and none delivereth ; for a spoil, and none saith restore.

It is where the breath of life comes that this sieve is used ; and that every poor sensible sinner knows who is convinced of sin by the Spirit of God. When the breath of life enters the soul, and quickens it—when divine sensations, motions, holy longings, desires, and affections, operate—this strong man, his possession, and armour, are soon felt. Not a corruption in the heart, but the devil stirs up to resist the new principle ; no species of uncleanness, lasciviousness, or even brutality, that was ever practised in all the world, but what the devil will bring to the mind :—no blasphemy, anathema, or imprecation, that was ever uttered, but what he will pronounce in the mental ears of the poor sinner all day and night long :—nothing that earth or hell can imagine against God, against Christ, or against the Holy Spirit, but what he will bring in, and fill the poor sinner's thoughts with :—nothing odious, unsightly, unseemly, unbecoming, foul, filthy, obscene, diabolical, damna-

ble, and opposite to true holiness, but what the devil will pourtray on the mind, and impress on the imagination of the poor, alarmed, awakened, terrified, and affrighted soul. Not a snare of death, nor a pain of hell, nor an evident token of perdition in scripture, in rebels, hypocrites, apostates, traitors, or reprobates, but what is suggested and applied to him. No;—nor a terror, horror, fear, expectation, or sensation, that ever pierced or influenced the minds of devils, but what Satan, with his art of mingling himself with the faculties of the human soul, will influence the poor sinner with.—Not a curse in the book of God; not a threatening, reproof, or rebuke; not a text pregnant with wrath, displeasure, or indignation; not a passage that describes an enemy to Christ, a rival, or an unpardonable sinner, but what is brought home and applied to the poor, honest, and sincere seeker of the Lord;—and that in all their fullest sense, and in all their most dreadful meaning that devils can invent, and self-despairing mortals can conceive. If he attempts to confess, pray, or call upon God, he is so confused, hurried, baffled, and confounded, that, so far from knowing what he says, he cannot tell where he is: his thoughts are scattered over the face of the whole earth, or chained down to the meditations of terror, or else employed in the dismal work of fathoming and exploring the boundless and bottomless abyss of hell. If he reads, he can neither think, consider, nor make a judgment of any thing. If
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in the house of God, and under the word, he can attend to nothing: all his attention is taken up with the oaths and curses and blasphemous revilings of this familiar spirit. If at any time the poor sinner can pay attention to but one word of support or encouragement, that is a refreshing time, a jubilee indeed; and the devil will be sure, if permitted, to make him rue for this ere he gets home, for presuming, or even daring, to entertain a thought that any one word in God's book could ever be sent or meant for such a wretch as he, who was doomed to damnation before the world was made, and who, at the same time, has every evident token of perdition upon him, and all the pledges, earnestts, foretastes, and pains of hell in him. All this is but a faint representation of Satan's sieve; and well may it be compared to a sieve, for chaff from the floor was never blowed with more violence than the hurried soul of such a poor sinner; and he is whirled round and round, till all his faculties and senses are so impaired, that he knows not what he is, where he is, nor what he does. All the chaff is sifted up to the very bottom; all his sins are before him; and all their guilt in him: his beauty consumes as a moth, his soul withers like a green herb, and grief drinks up his spirits.

I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve; yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. Amos ix. 9.
No impression, impulse, or sensation, from above;

not one word of truth or promise applied; not one grace of the Holy and Blessed Spirit of promise; not one holy longing, or earnest desire; nor one deep sigh, pious groan, or budding hope, shall ever be sifted out of the heart of a poor sensible sinner, that feels his need, sees his lost estate, and is hungering and thirsting after the Lord of life and glory. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*, when this sieve of vanity has well winnowed and emptied them of all self-righteousness, lightness, vanity, and self-confidence. *I will command, I will sift*:—no sifting, without God's command;—not one shake, nor one round-about in this riddle, without a divine order. *I will sift*. The devil and his sieve are both in the omnipotent and terrible hand of God; and it is the smoking vengeance of heaven, burning in Satan, that drives him on with his sieve, as bad as the devil's darts drive us. But, after all, it is no more than *a sieve of vanity*; for all this labour and toil of the poor devil is vain, for he cannot destroy, though he aims at it. Moreover, it is called *a sieve of vanity*, because the intention of God is to separate vanity and lies from us. The more vain we are, the more sifting we want: no vanity, no sieve. Peter's self-confidence was vain, and David's numbering the people was the same; and both procured this sieve. The incestuous person among the Corinthians gave himself up to vanity, and Paul gave him up to Satan, that he might be sifted, till his vanity departed

departed from him; and, as soon as his chaff was gone, he came into the barn floor again.—The Lord's forerunner alludes to my text, and casts a light upon it; only, instead of the *breath of the Lord*, he calls this power the *Holy Ghost*; and instead of a *sieve of vanity*, he calls it a *fan*. *He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* Mat. iii. 11, 12. The Holy Ghost and fire come first; and this disturbs Satan in his quiet possession. The Spirit convinces us of sin, and Satan tempts us to despair of the mercy of God; which leads me to consider this fatal bridle in my text.

And there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err. And here we may inquire—what this bridle is which causes men to err. A bridle, in the figurative sense of the word, seems to be the secret power of God put forth and displayed in overruling, restraining, and directing mankind, according to the counsel of his own will; though man, who has this restraint upon him, acts as he thinks, with the bent of his own will, and without control, and is as ignorant of this restraint as a horse or an ass. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, determined to invade the city of Jerusalem, and was come forth with a large army for that intent; and he sent a blasphemous message of raillery against the Jews, the king of Judah, and against God himself:
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the hearing of which sent the pious king to prayer, and he requested the prayers of Isaiah the prophet also; and God sent the king this answer against the railing enemy: *Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest; and he shall fall by the sword in his own land.* Here is God's hook in his nose, and his bridle in his lips; just as a man leads a bear, or rides an ass:—and back to Nineveh he goes, and into the house of Nisroch his god, where two of his own sons kill him with the sword.

Again. *Bridle* sometimes signifies that awe, reverence, and fear, that God has planted in the hearts of mankind towards the higher powers (Romans xiii. 3), or our superiors, or even aged persons. *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man. Render fear to whom fear is due, and honour to whom honour is due.* Of the reverse of this Job complains: *And now am I their song, yea, I am their by-word. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face. Because he hath loosed my cord and afflicted me, they have also let loose the bridle before me.* Job xxx. 11. Job had dwelt as a king in their army, and had presided over their counsels; and as a great man he was greatly respected. *Young men saw me, and hid themselves; the aged arose, and stood up; princes refrained talking, and nobles held their peace; unto me men gave ear, and kept silence*

silence at my counsel. But now God had loosed the cord of his love, which had long visibly embraced him, and all that he had, and had sorely afflicted him; and those who feared him before, seeing him so debased and humbled, cast off all reverence, respect, and even natural affection, and spared not to spit in his face. Times of trial discover the affections of those who love in deed and in truth, from those whose love is dissimulation. But neither of these bridles are meant in my text. God does not say, I will put my bridle in thy lips; but,

There shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err;—which plainly shews that these persons do not receive the Spirit of God, nor the truth of God in the love of it; *because they are given up to strong delusions, that they may believe a lie;*—for this bridle shall cause them to err. This bridle is not unbelief, nor is it false doctrine; for it is a bridle that guides a person into false doctrine, or that causes them to err, or to go astray into all manner of errors. And what can this bridle be? Why, it is *pride*. Pride is the devil's rod, or sceptre, by which he rules. *In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride; but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.* Prov. xiv. 3. Before ever God gives a man up to believe a lie, or to fall into damnable heresies, which lead to destruction, the devil is sure to get this bridle into his jaws. *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Prov. xvi. 18. This is the bridle that leads astray. *The pride of thy heart*
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hath deceived thee. Jer. xlix. 16. And again: *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.* Ps. cxix. 21. And to this agrees the apostle: *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strifes, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth.* 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5. The devil is a wise and cunning adversary, and well knows what is most hateful to God; and there is nothing more hateful to him than pride. It was this very bridle that led the devil from the truth, even to become *the father of lies*. The Lord says, *He abode not in the truth*:—what led him from it? The apostle tells us: *Not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil.* 1 Tim. iii. 6. Pride lifted the devils up into self-admiration, and for which God charged them with folly. Job iv. 18. And this bridle is in their jaws to this day: hence they aspire even to imitate God, and want to be worshipped as God. The Saviour himself was tempted by the devil to fall down and worship him. When Satan gets this bridle into the jaws of a sinner, he is sure to make him hold his head up, and to walk with a stiff neck. His heart is swollen, and puffed up like a bladder, until his blasphemy boils up, and runs out of his mouth: hence the warning—*Talk no more*

so exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed. 1 Sam. ii. 3. A professor, reined up with this bridle, is the most dangerous man in the world among weak believers: hence God blesses the poor simple soul that casts off all love and respect for him. *Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.* Psalm xl. 4. O what a blessing it is to be kept from the foot of pride, which leads to presumptuous sins, and involves men in the great transgression. *O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.* Psalm xxxi. 23.

Men of this cast, and in this state, act the same restless part that the devil does—always meddling with religion, though always conscious that they have none: and so it is with Satan. Go into what part of the world you may, you shall find Satan carrying on some sort or other of false religion: among the Turks, the Arabs, the Egyptians, Romans, Russians, Indians: go where you will, you shall find idolatry, superstition, will worship, a form of godliness, altars, temples, sacrifices, soothsaying, or something called devotion; and all against God, and in opposition to him: and hence Satan is styled the god of this world,—and a world of worshippers he has got in it.

A man with this bridle in his jaws is just like a bear with a muzzle; he can eat nothing that is good.

good. The best spiritual provision that can be dealt out from a pulpit, the most delicious food or richest fare that was ever set before the household of faith, all passes by his mouth. The man with this bridle in his jaws is never suffered so much as to taste that the Lord is good or gracious.

With this bridle he is reined up so high, and Satan holds him in so tight, that he can stoop to nothing; no, not to divine revelation. There is not one sublime mystery in the kingdom of God,—no revelation that God hath ever made of himself, of his wondrous works of creation, providence, grace, or redemption, that he can submit to: he is wise above all that is written.

Let the highway to glory be never so clearly cast up, and the stumbling blocks removed—let the standard be erected, and God's banner displayed—let the door of hope be opened, and the path of life made never so plain—it is all in vain: an infernal spirit ruling within perverts every thing; and one check by Satan with this bridle turns him out of the way. This bridle shall be in his jaws, causing him to err; for God (in just judgment), by the instrumentality of Satan, *leads him forth with the workers of iniquity; but peace shall be upon Israel.—He is given up of God to strong delusions, that he may believe a lie, and be damned, for not receiving the truth, but taking pleasure in unrighteousness.* And the devil, with this bridle, rides him, curbs him, reins him, and turns him whithersoever he will. *A whip for the*
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the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back, saith the wise man.

He is a wonder to himself, and stands astonished at his own wisdom. Every false ray that the devil (transformed) darts into his heart or head, every time he looks into the scriptures with his false mirror, what wonders does he behold! All his discoveries are such as have lain hid since the world began, till this wonder of wonders arose, till he arose a prophet in Israel! Every servant of God that he hears, every God-fearing man that he converses with, heightens his astonishment and admiration. What fools, what blind bats, what poor idiots, do they all appear to be, when compared to himself, and to that perfection of wisdom that dwells in him! Now and then, indeed, there shall be a discovery made; a ray of light darted, a truth brought forth, or such a sound speech dropped, which he cannot condemn, and which, for a moment, may stagger him; but this is but seldom:—and, as soon as ever the devil perceives this, he sticks his spurs in his side, and gives him another check with this double bridle; and away goes Jack, kicking up behind, for he must *lift up his heels* at every thing that favours of Christ.

In all his searches and researches God opposes him. *God resisteth the proud; but he giveth grace to the humble.* He searches the scriptures to support his damnable heresies, and to strengthen himself in his wickedness. God resists him, and it appears a
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sealed book: he rages at it, and storms; perverts it, and brings forth his strong reasons against it:—still it galls him, till at last he ridicules it, and rails against it, and despises it; *and he that despises the word shall be destroyed.* He lies in wait to deceive the humble, teachable, tractable soul, that walks in the simplicity of the gospel; but God resists him, and discovers to the meek and lowly believer the hardened state and stinking savour of this tool of Satan; and he shuns him, and flees from him. These he hates the worst, and tries the hardest to deceive; and with these he has the least success; for God resists him, and instructs his own children by his Spirit. *He guides the meek in judgment, the meek will be teach his way.* He labours to enshrine and exalt himself in the eyes and affections of God's people, in order to exclude them from Christ, and that he may be looked up to as a wonder from the Lord of hosts: but God resists him, till every professor that has any reverence of God, or respect for him, despises him, and looks upon him as an incurable leper, with the plague in his head, as a perilous transgressor, a hardened rebel, a cursed vagabond, an incarnate devil, and a walking hell, with every visible token of perdition upon him; and shuns him, and dreads him, as he would *a fiery flying serpent.*

It is upon these animals that the devil carries on the affairs of his kingdom, and his state matters. Without such men as these he could not well support his interest against the glorious light and power
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of the gospel of Christ. It is by such that Satan spreads his doctrines, blindness of mind, confusion, hardness of heart, hatred to the truth, pride, and presumption; in all which the kingdom of Satan stands. There is not a mystery in the Bible, not a doctrine essential to salvation, but what these men will attack. What arrogancy will they discharge from their mouth against the glorious doctrine of the Trinity; against the deity of the Son of God; and against the personality of the Holy Ghost! What contempt will they pour upon the satisfaction Christ made by his sacrifice; and upon the efficacy, weight, and worth of all his meritorious undertakings, sufferings, and finished work! To these Christ becomes a snare, a trap, and a stumbling. They kick, and he smites;—they presume, and he resists;—they peep and mutter, and he baffles and confounds them.

Hence we see, that where the gospel comes, there Satan stirs; and the more the power of God attends the word, the more Satan lays about him. Some hear the word, and give their assent and consent to it; but, as soon as they go from the house of God, then comes the wicked one, and steals away the word sown in their hearts, and they become unfruitful. Another hears it with pleasure and delight, till zeal, diligence, joy, and a visible reformation appears; but these Satan fills with the deceitfulness of riches, and the cares of this life, and leads them away after these things, till he chokes the

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word. Another sort hear it, and receive it notionally in their heads, and wonderful gifts and abilities follow; but then this stony ground affords no depth for the word to root in, these having no root, in time of temptation fall away. Others fall into Satan's sieve, and are effectually shook, tossed, tumbled, and winnowed: but to these the Lord appears, and takes the prey from the mighty, and delivers the lawful captive, who never forgets the wormwood and the gall. And those who escape the *sieve* are caught in Satan's *bridle*; and this is the worst of all; for Satan will never let such an one rest till he hath involved him in the guilt of the great transgression: he will make him with this bridle set his mouth against the heavens, and his tongue go through the earth, by circulating his damnable heresy. But the Lord's chosen ones return to the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls, while waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them. Blessed be God for convincing us of our ignorance and blindness, and for humbling us to submit to divine revelation; but, above all, for keeping us from kicking, stumbling, and taking offence, at the glorious foundation that he hath laid in Zion.

Again.—This bridle is said to be in the *jaws* of the people, causing them to err. Job makes mention of the jaws of the wicked. *I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.* Job xxix. 16, 17. Job compares

compares these spoilers to a voracious beast, or mastiff dog, which, when they seize a child, a lamb, kid, or calf, hold so fast, that there is no such thing as rescuing the poor creature, but by wrenching open the jaws by violence. Just such is an oppresser, a grinder of the face of the poor, an over-reacher, an overbearer, who is as insatiable after money, as a starven beast is after prey: *these greedy dogs can never have enough*; they go about the city, and grin like a dog, and grudge, but are never satisfied. Job set himself against these, and raised the court against them, and made them relinquish the spoil they had taken. *He hath swallowed down riches*, says Job, *but he shall vomit them up again; God shall cast them out of his belly*. Just such a beast of prey is a wolf in sheep's clothing, among the sheep and lambs of the Lord's fold; or, to keep to my text, just such an one is a damnable heretic, with this bridle of the devil in his jaws: to devour, divide, and scatter the sheep of Christ is all his work; and he is so bent upon it, that *his sleep is taken away, unless he hath caused some to fall*.

The mystical body of Christ is compared to the human body, and the different members of the body to individual believers of different sizes in growth, or in different stages of grace. The *foot* and the *ear* represent the diligent and the attentive believer; and such as these the devil is most watchful over; and when one of these devourers of the poor and needy have been let loose upon the flock,

nothing has been left for the Lord but three mangled members, and these sick in bed. *Thus saith the Lord, As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria, in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus on a couch.* Amos iii. 12.

In the heart of this monster of iniquity Satan rules; in his vain imagination Satan is exalted, and there he raises his high towers of self-conceit, human wisdom, self-sufficiency, independency, carnal reason, and the wonderful light of fallen nature; and every other *high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ, that not one thought may ever go into captivity to the obedience of him.* The reins of this bridle is infernal power, which leads this deluded wretch *captive at his will; nor can he recover himself out of this snare of the devil:* he hath chosen his own way, and God hath chosen his delusions. The bit of this bridle is *pride*; and a poor wretch hardened and stiffened with pride would sink into everlasting burning, before he would bow, yield, submit, or acknowledge an offence, or himself in an error. The Jewish Pharisees would plunge themselves in the guilt of innocent blood, and into the unpardonable sin up to the neck, and expose their nation to ruin, and themselves to the greatest damnation, rather than submit to the person or doctrines of Christ, or acknowledge the truth of one charge brought against them by the Son of God.

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This bridle was in their jaws, and the devil rode them, and managed them, in all their persecutions of Christ, from the manger to the cross: and they pursued him as bad after his resurrection, until the Roman sword came upon them; and then, just as Pharaoh and his troopers perished in the Red Sea, so these were drowned in destruction and perdition; *for wrath came upon them to the uttermost; and at the day of judgment such (saith Christ) shall go away with the devil and his angels.*

God hath set a *brand* upon several classes of people, which those who are skilled in physiognomy may read: *a whore's forehead* exhibits a defiance of all virtue, modesty, and chastity; it can redden at nothing; nothing can deface it but *Mary's repentance*. The midnight cry will make them change pale, but it will not make them *blush*. A fallen countenance informs us of the destruction of a false hope, and of some awful bill of indictment being filed in the court of conscience. A sad countenance on the butler and baker of Pharaoh informed Joseph of the sorrow of their hearts. The anxiety, pious concern, wishful eyes, and blubbered cheeks of the spouse in the Song, told the daughters of Jerusalem that she was crossed in love. *Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with thee?* The scorner in his chair is to be known by his *brow of brass*, which no reproof nor rebuke from man, no warning nor allurement by the minis-

try, ever melts or removes. A papist carries the mark of the beast in his forehead; judicial blindness, bigotry, hatred, and revenge, are evident enough. But this ungovernable animal in my text, when he is equipped, is the most conspicuous of all: defiance of heaven appears on his brow, pride swells his cheeks, and Satan looks through his eyes, and never suffers one plain truth, in real honesty, ever to come from his mouth. *This is the pale horse, and he that sits on him is Death, and hell follows him.* Rev. vi. 8. Be not like a horse or mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, and I will guide you with mine eye, saith the great Commander and Leader of his people; and where this eye, this true light shines, God grant we may ever follow. Amen, and amen.

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